

Pushing Higher

News from the

Carole Robertson Center for Learning

Dear Friends,

2008, Issue 2

Fall is here, and the Carole Robertson Center for Learning is shifting into high gear for back-to-school programming for all children and youth. No matter what the season, everybody at the Carole Robertson Center continues to learn. The Center has enjoyed a number of successes to brighten our days by celebrating children, staff, and parents this spring and summer. We also recognized the important accomplishments of the Center's volunteers, supporters, and friends.

The leadership of staff, parents, community partners, and friends of the Center demonstrates a support and commitment to children, the most aspiring and important legacy of tomorrow. By honoring and renewing our commitment to children, youth, and families today, we promote the beauty of tradition, culture, and knowledge of each other for generations to come. As you read about the Center's recognition and awards celebrations for programs, staff, parents, corporate and community partners, donors, volunteers, and friends, you will find that each not only expands the Center's vision, but also continues to see with an eye from where we came. The Carole Robertson Center for Learning was named to commemorate four children who tragically lost their lives, and in their memory we are inspired to continue growing as everyday leaders within our families and communities. We welcome a new season filled with new challenges and new successes ahead.

Finally, we would like to recognize all volunteers who helped make our spring and summer activities successful. Chicago Cares, Center for Student Missions, Deloitte & Touche, Harris Bank, and Jack & Jill of America are just a few of the volunteers who have generously donated their time and energy to the Carole Robertson Center. Your important service impacts us in many ways.

Thank you for your continued support and commitment to the Center's children and families. From many hearts, many thanks!



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President, Board of Directors



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The Carole Robertson Center for Learning is dedicated to nurturing, supporting, and strengthening family life through quality child, youth, and family development programs.

Annual Celebration Recognizes

This June, the Carole Robertson Center for Learning held the 2008 Annual Celebration event at **Carnivale** in Chicago's west loop. This year, the Center took a new approach by holding a reception that celebrated the Center's wonderful volunteers and dynamic community supporters.

The evening began with a warm welcome by **Denise Robertson**, Vice President of the Center's Board of Directors. For the last ten years, the Center has expanded its quality services and programs: new buildings, new accreditations, an increased hiring of staff, and more programs and services than ever, all of which benefit new children, youth, adults, and families.

In celebration of these achievements, **Gail Nelson**, Executive Director, gave staff members who achieved educational milestones or certifications a special recognition. Next, three awards to Center's outstanding volunteers were presented.

Princess Amie Calma was the recipient of the **Volunteer of the**

Year award for her dedication and service to the Early Childhood Education Program. This award honors outstanding volunteer service by an individual to the Carole Robertson Center for Learning. Awardees make significant contributions to the Center throughout the year by sharing their time, talents, and resources with children, youth, families, and staff.

Jack & Jill of America's Western Cook County Chapter received the **Friend of the Center** award, which honors corporate and community groups or individuals who have demonstrated a commitment to the Carole Robertson Center's work over time with volunteer, in-kind, monetary, and other support. Members **Pamela Scott** and **Michelle Vanderlaan** accepted the honor on behalf the Western Cook County Chapter.

Deloitte & Touche received the **Corporate Volunteer Group of the Year**, a special honor for corporate volunteer groups who have made important contributions to the Center through large scale or ongoing projects. Awardees bring hard

work and dedication, providing major service projects that would not otherwise be possible.

Additionally, attendees spent the evening exploring the Center through a silent auction, which consisted of photography and fine arts crafted by children in the School Age Program. Items included black and white photographs taken by children, ranging in ages from 5 to 12 years. This unique perspective gave the pictures a distinct flavor.

School age children also created a beautiful mosaic of the critically acclaimed jazz vocalist, Billie Holiday. The piece was crafted using contemporary materials such as iridescent beads and synthetic materials, as part of an exploration with innovative approaches to art.

The evening culminated in a raffle drawing, which consisted of prizes donated by downtown and west side businesses, all of who support the mission of the Center.



Above: CRCL Board members and friends enjoy the atmosphere at Carnivale.



Middle: Amie Calma, Volunteer of the Year award recipient, celebrates her recognition.



Right: Staff member Julie Fisher attends the Annual Celebration in support of the Center.

Volunteers and Community Partners



Top, left: Staff member Liz Bell (left) and Board Member, Parent, Ana Lopez (right).



Top, right: Art Murnan, a lifelong supporter of CRCL (left), staff members Robin Johnson (center) and Vivian Miller (right) share laughs.



Above: Pamela Scott (left) and Michelle Vanderlaan (right) proudly display their Friend of the Center award on behalf of Jack & Jill of America's Western Cook County Chapter.

Below: Community partners, corporate groups, staff, and guests celebrate the Center's success while waiting for the results of the silent auction fundraiser (left, middle).



Youth Awards Celebration 2008

The **Youth Alternatives Program** at the Carole Robertson Center celebrated another year of successful programming for the betterment, empowerment, and self-awareness of today's youth at the **Youth Awards Celebration 2008**.

On a mild evening last May, the teens and parents of the Youth Alternatives Program gathered to celebrating the hard work and success of youth. The event was held in the Carole Robertson Center for Learning's gymnasium, a place where many youth come to play basketball, make friendships, and build leadership skills through sports and cultural activities. The evening began with a welcome by Ruby Walker, Director of Program Operations, and

Kenyon Carter, Youth Council President. Inspirational speakers and artistic performances, including spoken word poetry, the Youth Choir, and the Jazz Band Ensemble, brought everyone into a good mood for the awards presentation.

The **Booda Leadership Award** was earned by **Anthony Nance**, YAP participant for the last three years. His commitment to community service and completing high school, all while balancing two jobs, earned him this honor.

Jerry Gilmore, age 12, won a **Service Learning Award** for his participation in Project IMANI (I Make a Needed Impact). His dedication to IMANI through leadership development and the

Center for the last four years demonstrates his commitment to service learning.

Tanae Jackson, Project DREAM (Determined to Reach Out, Empower, Achieve, and Mentor) participant, received a **Service Learning Award** for her service to early childhood education classrooms. She seized the opportunity to receive structural, skill-based education.

A sports presentation by Tommie Jackson, instructor, ended the program. Afterwards, a slide show of beautiful pictures and a warm reception allowed youth, families, and staff to unite and rejoice in friendship. Thank you to everyone for making this a memorable event!



Left: The Brass Ensemble, including musical director Jamal Mayfield, practice for an upcoming concert. The band rehearses daily at the Center, with a focus on musical skills and teamwork.

2008 - 2009 Board of Directors

Mary Monroe, <i>President</i>	Dianne Robertson Braddock	Ana Lopez
Denise Robertson, <i>Vice-President</i>	Mellodie Brown	Torrio Osborne
Maria Luna, <i>Secretary</i>	Caryn Curry	Scott Payant
Dave Robertson, <i>Treasurer</i>	Jamellah Braddock Ellis	Monna Ray
Gail Nelson, <i>Executive Director</i>	Veronica Gipson	Jewerystine Sampson
	Marie E. Hardy	Toya Shaffer
	Georgia Jones	Ann Marie Slater
	Margaret Kibaya	

Youth Attend Film, Basketball Camps

Marvell Davis, age 12, has been attending the Carole Robertson Center for the past three years. This summer, he attended the **Young Chicago Critics Film Camp for Kids**. Sponsored by the **Chicago International Children's Film Festival** and held at **Facets Multimedia** studio, this week-and-a-half long camp gave Marvell and other youth his age the opportunity to critique short films from all over the world, and to create their own live action movies. Marvell was challenged by the camp directors to add professional details to his film critiques and thoughtfully explain why others should "see it" or "skip it."

Youth studied the **Ebert & Roeper** television show for guidance and received advice from professional reviewer **John Petrakis** and **Michael Phillips**,

head film critic for the **Chicago Tribune** and regular contributor on **Ebert & Roeper**.

Marvell admitted he was nervous at first not knowing anyone else at film camp, but soon made lots of new friends,



Marvel Davis, age 12 (above).

especially when they began creating their film "Mystic Plant." Marvell not only acted in this short film, but also was specifically selected to design storyboards for the film. Marvell admits he always liked drawing as a hobby, and the camp helped Marvell see his talent in a new light: as part of the creative process in film production. This experience increased his confidence in being able to meet deadlines, make friends, and work successfully on a team to reach a desired goal. Marvell looks forward to other opportunities as a Young Chicago Critic. In addition to becoming an engineer, Marvell plans to explore the possibility of becoming a professional film critic.

Youth train at the Carole Robertson Center's gym for University of Illinois Boys Basketball Camp (below).

Eight young men from the Center's **Youth Alternatives Program** traveled to Champaign, Illinois this past June with youth staff chaperones to attend the **University of Illinois Boys Basketball Camp**. This trip was the inspiration of **Margaret Evans**, a volunteer tutor at the Center who presented the idea and raised funds from her family and friends for this special opportunity.

For most of the youth who participated, this four-day camp was their first exposure to a college campus: taking the train to Champaign; sleeping in dorm rooms; keeping their own schedules and staying on time; and adjusting to long treks between buildings across

campus. The intense physical conditioning also surprised many who attended the camp, but they met the challenge and gained a realistic understanding about how hard one works in order to reach a goal.

Interacting with youth from other states and with varied skill levels not only helped the Center's youth deepen their communication skills, but also reinforced the lesson that winning is not always the most important part in playing a game; the experience itself can often be the prize.

Thank you donors for your generosity, and youth staff members for your support.



School Age Children Honored with

At the Carole Robertson Center for Learning, last year's accomplishments of children in the School Age Program were honored through an awards ceremony and banquet at **New Zion Missionary Baptist Church**. The Center proudly announces the **2008 School Age Awards** recipients for the following categories:

Group Leadership Award

Fabian Anzo
Victoria Arreguin
Taiwo Ayedun
Mariah Dowdell
Sabrina Fitz
Ricardo Gomez
Teniya Merrick
Alexis Pantojas

Group Leadership Award (cont'd)

Brianna Pride
Bryan Rebolledo
Kalia Sims
Nico Suter
Lesile Torres
William Townsend
Kourtney Walker
Aaliyah Williams

Bill Wilson Loyalty Award

Mahogany Hart
Maleria Pearson
Davina Rios

Hedlin Dairy Award for Special Merit

Mauricio Leon
Andrew Montoya
Ashiana Slaughter

Maria Whelan Spirit Award

Deja Dishmon
Keiahn Harris
Salma Lopez

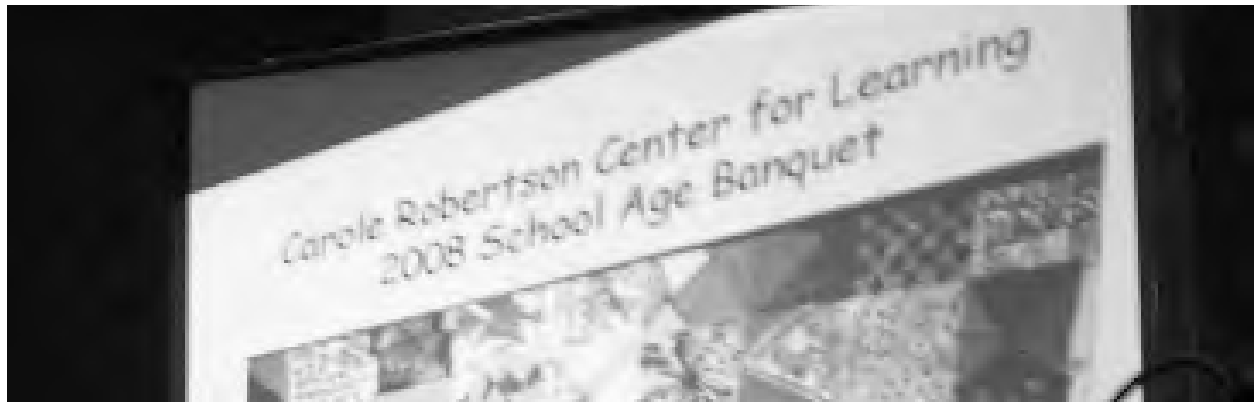
Gardner Children's Leadership Award

Armando Carpintero
Queenmeisha Davis
Oliver Hart

Wanda Gardner Parent Leadership Award

Elozia Lomas
Marilyn Marshall
Charles Merrick

A very special thank you to all school age children and parents who attended the event!



Above: The 2008 School Age Banquet begins with a slideshow of the year's activities. Among those are handcrafted mosaics by school age children, featuring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Billie Holiday (below).



Awards Ceremony

The **Bill Wilson Loyalty Award** was established in 1984. It is awarded to those who demonstrate exemplary loyalty to the CRCL. Bill worked in the School Age Program from 1977 until shortly before his death in 1983.

The **Hedlin Dairy Award for Special Merit** was established in 1982 thanks to the efforts of the Center's milkman, Bernie Santowski. It honors those who have earned special recognition, often in the face of challenging circumstances.

The **Maria Whelan Spirit Award** was established in 1990 in honor of the founding executive director of the CRCL. It is awarded to the most enthusiastic and exuberant ones! In addition to her spirit, Maria is known for her vision, persistence, energy, wisdom, and outstanding sense of humor.

Gardner Children's Award for Outstanding Leadership

The Children's Outstanding Leadership Award was established in 1977 to honor outstanding leaders in the School Age Program. It was renamed in 1991 in honor of Basheba and Quentin Gardner, two School Age Program participants who were tragically killed in February 1991 at the age of 15 and 9, respectively.

The **Wanda Gardner Parent Leadership Award** was established in 1991. It honors Wanda Gardner, a parent at the Center from 1981 until her untimely death with her children Basheba and Quentin in 1991. Wanda played an active role at the Center, in her children's schools, and in the community. Wanda served as a parent representative on the Board of Directors from 1986 to 1991. The award honors active and involved parents, whose contributions are vital to the success of the School Age Program.

School age children smile at the "2008 School Age Awards" as they prepare for the evening's program, which includes cultural dance, theatrical, spoken word, choral, and band performances (below).



Parents proudly watch their children receive awards for merit and leadership skills (below).



Dinner Dance 2008 Celebration

More than 150 staff and parents came together for the **2008 Dinner Dance Annual Staff and Parent Awards Celebration**. This year dawned a new event exclusively for staff and parents, and held at **Polonia Banquets** with the inspirational theme "Poised for Perfection."

Since 1998, the Carole Robertson Center has experienced continued growth. In friendship and pride, the Center celebrated the achievements of its staff and parents, many of who have made exceptional contributions over the past year. **Dinner Dance**

2008 also gave staff and parents an opportunity to renew and strengthen their commitment of providing and expanding quality services available to children, youth, and families.

2008 Staff and Parent Awards:

Outstanding Parent Volunteer

Elsa Arias
Charles Merrick
Oralia Reyes
Alfonso Roman

Outstanding Parent Leadership

Toya Shaffer
Sondra Turner-Caldwell

Outstanding Family Child Care Provider

Delondia Robinson

Unsung Hero

Maria Ayala
Elizabeth Bell
Constance Husband
Jose Luis Vera
Delores Washington

MVP Staff Member of the Year

Oscar Arreola
Andrea English
Edna Macklin
Norma Reyes
Bulmaro Salazar
Rachel Williams



Photos: Dinner Dance 2008 culminates into an evening of good food, fun, and friendship for the Center's staff and parents.



Harris Bank CEO Volunteers

What does it mean to "Live United" in Chicago? These simple words involve a great deal of leadership when spoken by the dedicated employees of Harris Bank. This summer, the Carole Robertson Center for Learning had the special opportunity to welcome Ellen Costello, CEO of Harris Bank N.A., and her outstanding management staff Kit Bingham and Marc Romito as volunteers in early childhood classrooms. Ms. Costello and her staff led a team of junior employees at Harris Bank in a morning-long volunteer project with the Early Childhood Education Program.

Volunteers engaged young learners in a Literacy Rotation, which consisted of six projects that focused on building literacy and language skills through game-like activities. To begin, Ms. Costello and her team read stories to children in small groups. Volunteers also played games that improved matching skills, colored pictures together with crayons, used gross-motor

skills by playing the game "Duck-Duck-Goose," sang the song "Old MacDonald Had a Farm," and explored healthy nutrition in a yummy, food experience.

When asked what volunteers enjoyed most about the Carole Robertson Center, many responses expressed they had a great time. "I really enjoyed seeing the kids smile, and I was able to make some connections during the time I spent with them," said a Harris Bank volunteer.

"The commitment by staff was reflected in the children," said another Harris Bank volunteer. "I was touched by the services offered to the children and the experience was exciting and fun."

The Harris Bank volunteer project was made possible through United Way's Day of Caring program, and marked the Center's first "Live United" experience. Recently, the United Way of Metropolitan Chicago

launched a movement to "Live United" through volunteerism that focuses on the following goals: education, health, and income. The volunteer service of Harris Bank employees demonstrates a commitment to the betterment of education, health, and income for children, families, and communities on Chicago's west side.



Harris Bank volunteers (above, below). Special guest Ellen Costello, CEO of Harris Bank N.A., engages two young children (below) in a classroom.



Jack & Jill of America Focus on Health

What do **Deloitte & Touche** and **Jack & Jill of America** have in common? Yes, you guessed correctly: the Carole Robertson Center for Learning! These hard-working groups have dedicated numerous hours to the Center through volunteer service projects that impact the learning and success of children in the Early Childhood Education, School Age, and Youth Alternatives Programs.

Jack & Jill of America's Western Cook County Chapter volunteers implemented a book reading for children in the Early Childhood Education Program and started a dialogue with youth about public health issues.

Jack & Jill mothers and their teenage daughters read wonderful stories aloud to many children, ages 3 to 5 years old. The children were surprised to

find that Jack & Jill teens had written, animated, and bound some of the books. Jack & Jill of America gifted the books to the Center in support of building children's literacy skills.

Jack & Jill teens of the Western Cook County Chapter also visited the Center to coordinate and implement health education activities for a youth audience. Youth viewed selections from the movie "Sicko" and participated in discussions about wellness and health care issues, particularly among minority communities. Chapter members **Nomathemba Pressley** and **Pamela Scott** were discussion leaders and organizers of this important event. We appreciate your time, leadership, and giving our youth the chance to meet the teens of Jack & Jill.

Jack & Jill of America's Chicago Chapter sponsored the **Spring Health Fair 2008** in partnership with the Carole Robertson Center. Chapter member **Robye Smith** coordinated Jack & Jill teens and parents to volunteer for set-up and staffing of the fair for school age children and parents. At this Saturday afternoon event, Jack & Jill medical doctors, dentists, and other Chapter volunteers focused on healthy living through activities such as basketball, bowling, literacy activities, a fitness obstacle course, and flower potting crafts. School age children participated in health awareness practices that included blood pressure and heart rate checks, and learning information about dermatology and diabetes issues.



Left: Jack & Jill of America's Chicago Chapter displays its banner after a successful day of volunteering at the Spring Health Fair 2008 health and wellness event.

Below: Jack & Jill of America's Western Cook County Chapter unites with the Center's youth to discuss healthcare issues affecting minority groups.



Deloitte IMPACTS the Center

Deloitte & Touche employees impacted the Center this year with three volunteer projects: a painting project; cultural craft projects with school age children; and a major playground rehabilitation and beautification project in celebration of Deloitte's IMPACT Day.

A lively group of Deloitte volunteers and youth from the Center joined forces to beautify educational training rooms and the library. Deloitte staff members quickly assessed the rooms, applied protective floor and trim covering, and dipped brushes into paint trays all afternoon. The project was completed in record time with excellent craftsmanship!

Next, a highly motivated group of Deloitte volunteers implemented a Learning Rotation in the School Age Program. Deloitte mentored children, ages 5 to 12 years, by spending time together constructing piñatas, clay sculpture, flags of the Americas, and book-making activities, all in celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month. Deloitte's volunteer experience came to the Carole Robertson Center through United Way's Day of Caring network.

This summer, Deloitte volunteers improved the functionality and look of the Center's playground by spreading woodchips and mulch,

constructing planter boxes, and planting shrubs. Additionally, volunteers painted colorful murals to use as fence art, decorations to inspire the creative minds of children as they play outside. Deloitte's successful IMPACT Day was made possible in partnership with Chicago Cares.



Top: Deloitte staff volunteer at a Learning Rotation for children.

Deloitte staff implement IMPACT Day 2008 through a major playground improvement project (left, below).



Quality Volunteer Service

Energetic employees from the **American Association of Endodontists** spent time volunteering at the Carole Robertson Center for Learning this summer. This group of volunteers, led by **Beverly Albert**, joined children ages 5 to 12 years in the School Age Program for a Learning Rotation that focused on good dental health practices.

Volunteers engaged children with learning activities such as brushing and flossing teeth, eating healthy dairy foods and vegetables, reader's theater, and fun clay sculpture. Additionally, each child received a new toothbrush and floss. What a great day of learning about good dental practices, sharing laughs, and having fun!

The Carole Robertson Center for Learning thanks the American Association of Endodontists for giving their quality volunteer service to children and supporting the Center's mission.

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